

The Black Diamond Cutters

By Joe Shovel

They're going to settle the strike question with conciliation boards—so they think. Down here in Pennsylvania we've been getting our manhandling on that plan. As a result, the miners say the next thing they have to strike against is conciliation boards.

As President Wilson says, "the adjudication of any dispute necessarily results in some disappointments." Only the President doesn't get the disappointments; the miners get them. The lesson was expensive. 155,000 hard coal miners were fleeced of \$30,000,000 in twenty minutes. But they learned what conciliation boards are—just reinforcements for the boss.

Being unable to live on the pay they were getting, and being unable to strike because the government was loaded and primed to grab the Union funds and to jail the strikers and their leaders, the workers in the three anthracite districts accepted the offer of the President that they leave their claims in the hands of a commission appointed by him, and to abide by the result. Wilson appointed W. L. Connell to represent the coal companies, Neal Ferry to represent the mine workers, and Professor W. O. Thompson of Ohio State University "to represent the public".

The hard coal miners had been "good" during the war on the promise that something would be done for them later. Everybody conceded that they had to have a raise. Their agreement expired on April 1st of this year. On that date the coal operators raised the price of coal \$1.00 a ton to cover a raise of 27% in the workers' pay. But when the commission met, the operators refused to give more than 17%.

Professor M. B. Hammond, the expert economist attached to the commission, replied to the operators with a report that the workers could not live on less than \$1600 a year, which would mean an increase of 27%. For saying this Hammond got sent home, and his boss, Professor Thompson, declared that 24% was all that the workers were entitled to. As Thompson had absolute power as the third or "neutral" member of the Commission, the workers decided that they would have to accept the 24% raise, disappointing though it was. But suddenly Thompson and Connell

came out with a report as the final award of the commission, that the workers should receive a raise of only 17%. John T. Dempsey, President of the United Mine Workers District No. 1, as a technical advisor took sides with the mine owners against the workers.

It took the majority of the commission, Connell and Thompson, just twenty minutes to rob the coal diggers of that 10% which amounts to \$30,000,000.

Neal Ferry made a minority report protesting the award.

The award goes down the list of the claims of the mine workers and the bosses and carefully picks out every point that will preserve the power of the coal companies.

The workers were caught coming and going. If they refused the award they would lose even the 17% of back pay for the five months since April 1st. And if they accepted the award of 17% they would lose the right to strike for the other 10% that they were being cheated of. So the three hard coal districts voted to accept the award. Then they voted not to strike but to take a vacation, saying they would return when they get the rest of the 27% raise. In their disgust they even overlooked a little point—they forgot to leave the pumpmen at work to keep the mine properties from flooding. The hasty wording of the vacation resolution made the pumpmen think they were called out, too, and out they went, and the mines began to fill up with water. The operators ordered the clerks and civil engineers and fire bosses to man the pumps, and in District No. 9, around Shamokin, these fellows refused to scab.

The vacation got one result, if you can call it a result: it made the Government open up again the question of the award and the men's rights that had been sold out. On the Department of Labor's promise to reopen the question, the men have gone back.

But they didn't go back everywhere at once. In the Shamokin District, No. 9, they refused to let the clerks, fire bosses and civil engineers be discharged for refusing to scab. These "confidential men" not being eligible under the constitution